

# EXHIBIT L



## Local News

# To dispel 'bad information,' ICE opens detention facility in Tacoma to first-of-its kind media tour

Sep. 10, 2019 at 7:30 pm | *Updated Sep. 11, 2019 at 9:02 am*





1 of 9 | Detainees are moved Tuesday through the Northwest ICE Processing Center in Tacoma. The center, recently renamed, holds people... (Bettina Hansen / The Seattle Times) [More](#) ✓



By **Nina Shapiro**

*Seattle Times staff reporter*

After years of complaints and lawsuits over its treatment of immigrant detainees, the federal government invited reporters to take an “inside look” Tuesday at its detention center in Tacoma, recently renamed the Northwest ICE Processing Center.

Nathalie Asher, who arrived in August to head enforcement and removal operations throughout the Northwest for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), said she initiated the first-of-its-kind tour to dispel myths and “bad information” that she said had created a hostile environment for officers at the facility. Some had even received threatening phone calls at home, she said.

And in July, police [killed a onetime protester](#) who returned to the detention center and threw incendiary devices — an incident that Asher said could have been catastrophic.

“Certainly, we are not a popular entity in the area,” she said, returning to the subject repeatedly as she led about 15 journalists through the second of two tours Tuesday.

“You will see a well-run operation,” she promised as she started the tour, which showed off bright, white-walled hallways painted by detainees with murals, a medical center with an X-ray and examination rooms, and a pod where detainees sat on bunk beds or talked to each other at metal tables. At one table was Jose Robles, who after a year in sanctuary at a downtown Seattle church, [turned himself in to ICE in July](#).

Outside the detention center, however, activist Maru Mora-Villalpando declared the tour a whitewash and said just the day before, she had heard from detainees that they had found live maggots in food. Asher said she would look into it.

ADVERTISING

The privately run detention center is owned by the GEO Group and holds up to 1,575 immigrants accused by the government of living in the U.S. illegally and now facing deportation proceedings.

It comes at a time when detention facilities are in the spotlight, especially those at the border where [children are being held](#) in conditions described by doctors, lawyers and advocates for immigrants as inhumane.

Material distributed by ICE before the tour — including forms requiring reporters to

stick to strict rules, such as not interviewing detainees — noted that the detention center has never housed children.

Still, controversy has long surrounded the detention center. Detainees have held a series of [hunger strikes](#) to protest what they say is inadequate food and \$1-a-day wages for what GEO calls a “voluntary work program.” Some hunger strikers have said they were put into solitary confinement and in one case beaten — the subject of an ongoing ACLU lawsuit against ICE and GEO. One hunger-striker [died by suicide](#) late last year.

The death of Mergensana Amar, who before taking his life told a lawyer he had been stripped of his clothes and kept in a cold cell with only a thin covering, prompted Gov. Jay Inslee and several Democratic members of Congress to raise concerns about health care and call for an investigation.

The Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Inspector General agreed to investigate Amar’s death, and is still in the process of doing so, according to a spokeswoman. The office also said in December it is considering an unannounced inspection of the detention center, which the spokeswoman said she could not say more about.

ADVERTISING

Asher said she could not talk about Amar's death, either, while it is under investigation. Asked about general policies for those on suicide watch, she said she did not know if detainees were ever left naked in cells with just a thin blanket, or if the facility used coverings called "suicide smocks."

Tacoma police reports from the last six years, obtained through a public records request, reveal that the facility has seen at least one attempted suicide before, in 2014, when a detainee cut his wrist and attempted to hang himself with a sheet. The detainee was taken to a hospital.

Asher maintained that medical and mental health care was a top priority, leading the facility to employ doctors, nurse practitioners, psychiatrists and social workers.

---

## Sign up for Morning Brief

*Delivered bright and early weekday mornings, this email provides a quick overview of top stories and need-to-know news.*

**Sign up**

---

Referring to detainees, she added, "many of these people are coming from Third World countries and have frankly never seen a doctor in their lives." (Other detainees have also lived in the U.S. for years.) Within two weeks, Asher said, detainees get a "head-to-toe examination." She talked about working at the facility as a deportation officer in 2005, and seeing detainees get glasses, allowing them to see clearly for the first time.

"It's transformational," she said.

The detention center has a harder time providing care than in the past, she said, because most jails in the region now refuse to cooperate with immigration enforcement. Before sanctuary policies in Washington and elsewhere, the facility would receive files on people transferred from local jails, which had information

about their medical condition.

Some facilities also refused to accept referrals from the detention center, including, Asher said, Western State Hospital, which is the state's largest psychiatric hospital.

Meanwhile, GEO is [battling state Attorney General Bob Ferguson](#) in court over his allegations that the facility is violating Washington's minimum-wage laws. GEO says it follows federal standards, and Asher said the \$1-a-day rate will continue until the suit is resolved.

Dozens of complaints made over the last three years to Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, make various other allegations: food served on dishes not properly cleaned; meals of beans five days in a row; lack of interpretation services; and guards coercing a detainee to sign documents. Most of the complaints appear to have been closed, though it is often not clear from the documents if any action was taken.

ICE's counteroffensive included giving out sample menus portraying a varied diet: chicken and rice, stir-fried vegetables and cheese enchiladas are among the listed entrees.



"Is everybody going to be happy with the meals? Probably not," Asher said. "It's institutional food."

With the torrent of bad press surrounding the detention center, it would not be a surprise if its name change reflected an attempted image makeover. ICE said the decision lay with GEO, which through a spokeswoman gave a more mundane reason: "to better reflect the services provided at the facility" and to be consistent with other similarly named facilities owned by the company.

**Nina Shapiro:** 206-464-3303 or [nshapiro@seattletimes.com](mailto:nshapiro@seattletimes.com);

---

## Most Read Local Stories

- 1 King County teen is first in state diagnosed with severe lung disease related to vaping
- 2 King County councilmember proposes spending \$1 million to bus homeless people out of the region
- 3 Controversy at Christian school in Shoreline marks a blast from the past in gay-rights wars | Danny Westneat
- 4 ‘Unbelievable’ story of Lynnwood teen’s rape case retold on Netflix  WATCH
- 5 To dispel 'bad information,' ICE opens detention facility in Tacoma to first-of-its kind media tour  VIEW

---

 [View 83 Comments](#)

---

## Latest in Local News







## Meet the Seattle Labradoodle who landed on a...

A "Harry Potter"-obsessed Seattle couple gave their dog a magical moniker that ended up on... [New 7:05 am](#)

---

## Lime works to recharge its Seattle bike fleet,...

Seattle allows the free-floating rental bikes to be parked in public spaces. But if bikes... [New 6:00 am](#)

---

## Police: Teen livestreamed crash that killed mother, injured toddler in Tukwila

Amairani Uribe Beltran, 23, was killed in a head-on collision in Tukwila on Aug. 12. A warrant has been issued for the arrest of the... [New 6:00 am](#)

---

## Proctor fired after he complained a health-licensing test was unfair to Somali candidates, lawsuit claims

The employee says he repeatedly complained that the translation of the home-care test was fundamentally unfair to Somali candidates, and was fired because he contacted... [New 6:00 am](#)

---

ADVERTISING

---

**Contact**



**About the company**



**Advertise**



**Subscriber Services**



**Today's Front Page**

 **Facebook**

 **Twitter**

Copyright © 2019 The Seattle Times | [Privacy statement](#) | [Terms of service](#)